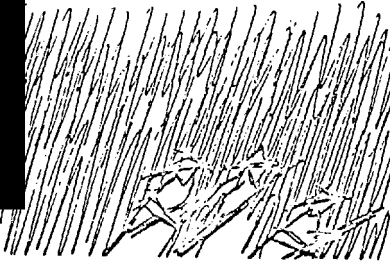


January 7, 1966



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BANKRUPTCY OF THE LIBERALS



"They are all honorable men"

CARL OGLESBY

Seven months ago at the April March on Washington, Paul Potter, then President of Students for a Democratic Society, stood in approximately this spot and said that we must name the system that creates and sustains the war in Vietnam — name it, describe it, analyze it, understand it, and change it.

Today I will try to name it — to suggest an analysis which, to be quite frank, may disturb many of you — and to suggest what changing it may require of us.

We are here again to protest again a growing war. Since it is a very bad war, we acquire the habit of thinking that it must be caused by very bad men. But we only conceal reality, I think, to denounce on such grounds the menacing coalition of industrial and military power, or the brutality of the blitzkrieg we are waging against Vietnam, or the ominous signs around us that heresy may soon no longer be permitted. We must simply observe, and quite plainly say, that this coalition, this blitzkrieg, and this demand for acquiescence are creatures, all of them, of a government that since 1932 has considered itself to be fundamentally liberal.

The original commitment in Vietnam was President Truman's — a liberal and signer of the first civil rights act. That commitment was seconded by the moderate liberal, President Eisenhower — who mobilized the National Guard to integrate Central High School in Little

Rock. And intensified by President Kennedy, a liberal who gave us the Peace Corps, the Alliance for Progress, and the beginnings of the anti-poverty program. Think of the men who now engineer that war — those who study the maps, give the commands, push the buttons, and tally the dead: Bundy, McNamara, Rusk, Lodge, Goldberg, the President himself.

They are not moral monsters.

They are all honorable men.

They are all liberals.

But so, I'm sure, are many of us who are here today. To understand the war, then, it seems necessary to take a closer look at this American liberalism. Maybe we are in for some surprises. Maybe we have here two quite different liberalisms: one authentically humanist, the other not so human at all.

Not long ago, I considered myself a liberal. And if someone had asked me what I meant by that, I'd perhaps have quoted Thomas Jefferson or Thomas Paine, who first made plain our nation's unprovisional commitment to human rights. But what do you think would happen if these two heroes could sit down now for a chat with President Johnson and McGeorge Bundy?

They would surely talk of the Vietnam war. Our dead revolutionaries would soon wonder why their country was fighting against what appeared to be a revolution. The living liberals would hotly deny that it is one: there are troops coming in from outside, they get arms from other countries, most of the people are not on their side, and they practice terror against their own. Therefore, *not* a revolution.

CARL OGLESBY is the president of the Students for a Democratic Society. The above address was delivered on November 27 as part of the March on Washington for Peace in Vietnam.